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MISSION WORK

AMONG

THE MOUNTAIN WHITES IN ASHEVILLE PRESBYTERY,

NORTH CAROLINA

BY

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MISSION WORK AMONG "THE MOUNTAIN WHITES" IN ASHEVILLE PRESBYTERY, NORTH CAROLINA.

A great deal of what has been written about "the mountain whites of the South" has excited bitterness and resentment among them. This is due partly to sweeping and indiscriminate statements, partly to the bad odor that always emanates from a class appellation that seems to imply peculiarity, if not inferiority. A few have written as though they had visited a menagerie and were describing what they saw when the animals were stirred up! Of course this has stirred the animals up still more.

The writer of this paper is one of the mountain whites of the South, having never set foot beyond these mountain ranges until he was a full-grown man. He is not ashamed to claim kinship with the race that produced Abraham Lincoln, Cyrus H. McCormick, Zebulon B. Vance, Stonewall Jackson, and a host of other distinguished men. It is time that the mountain whites should speak for themselves, and it is with a deep love for his people and an earnest desire for their betterment that the writer takes up his pen to state some facts that ought to be known. Like "all people that on earth do dwell," we may claim the right to say things about ourselves which we resent when said by others. A woman may scold her husband for his faults, but it is strictly a family affair, and even his peccadilloes are too sacred for her patiently to hear them dilated upon by others.

The writer proposes to "speak the truth in love." If any of his own people should feel inclined to take offense at aught that may be said, he can only ask with sorrow of heart, "Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?"

If his words shall be used of God to create a deeper and more active interest in behalf of those mountain whites who, as we shall see, stand in dire need of better educational and religious privileges, there is at least one mountain white who shall be

thankful to God and grateful to the stewards of His manifold grace.

I. WHO ARE WE?

The name "mountain whites of the South" is a misnomer, implying limitations that do not belong to our people. Whilst the strain is white PAR EXCELLENCE—fair in skin, hair and eyes—it's habitat it not confined to the mountains, much less to the mountains of the South.

It has been satisfactorily proved, I think, that the main stock is Scotch-Irish, upon which have been grafted shoots of English, Dutch and German origin. The first settlers of this stock made their home in Western Pennsylvania, and, intermingling to some degree with the strains just named, the race expanded by natural increase and fresh immigration, chiefly southward, and gradually spread through the valleys, coves and highlands of the Appalachian mountains. But there was a double overflow, giving to the Piedmont region on the East the sturdy men of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence, and the warriors that fought at Guilford Court House, King's Mountain and Cowpens; and on the other hand contributing the most powerful current to that resistless tide of pioneers to whom is due the winning of the West. The investigations of the Scotch-Irish Society of America have amply demonstrated that this race has played a part second to none in shaping the destinies of this country. The Scotch-Irish type is as distinct as the Puritan, the Huguenot, and the Cavalier, and is no less honorable in character and achievement. To this race belonged the men of West Augusta in whose fortitude Washington confided in the darkest hour of the American Revolution; the famous "Stonewall Brigade," from its great leader to its indomitable private soldier, was composed chiefly of Scotch-Irish men; and the first and second Congressional districts of Tennessee, whose people are of this same sturdy stock, "furnished more soldiers to the Federal army, according to their population, than any other two Congressional districts in the United States," and there were none who suffered and sacrificed more than they for the cause of the Union.

Dr. Henry M. Maccracken, Chancellor of New York Univer-

sity, asserts that the Scotch-Irish race, which numbers hardly one-eighth of our population, has furnished one-fourth of our Presidents. This is the race to which the so-called mountain whites of the South belong.

Dr. John Hall, one of the grandest representatives of this race, was accustomed to tell this story at the meetings of the Scotch-Irish Congress:

"An English author describes a young lady who was in the habit of giving her friends quite a long list of her own personal virtues, just as we hear of the excellent qualities of the Scotch-Irish, and then she always wound up with this simple statement: 'But I am not proud, because ma says that is sinful.' "

II. But it is not the purpose of this paper to dwell on those characteristics and achievements which constitute the glory of this sturdy stock, but to draw attention to THE CRYING NEEDS OF A CONSIDERABLE PORTION OF OUR SCOTCH-IRISH POPULATION.

We have been too sensitive and proud in our attitude towards those who have sought to make known the sad condition of large numbers of our people who are far removed from the highways of civilization. We have been the more inclined to resent these statements, because those who publish them have often appeared to assume (perhaps unconsciously) that the state of affairs described is peculiar to this part of the country, and that it is a fair picture of the general condition of the people. All this seems to be implied in the very term "Mountain whites of the South." As a matter of fact, the same condition of affairs is found, though not so extensively, in the mountains of Pennsylvania and New York, and in large sections of the West, and a much worse condition exists in parts of every great city in the Union. And on the other hand, a large proportion of the inhabitants of the Southern Appalachians are the equals in character and intelligence of any population on the globe.

While, therefore, we may feel justly outraged by any indiscriminate classification of our people as HEATHEN, this should not deter us from looking indisputable facts squarely in the face, and from acting vigorously in accordance with what we see.

If the Apostle Paul had "great heaviness and continual sor-

row in his heart for his brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh," and if his "heart's desire and prayer to God for them was, that they might be saved," surely the deplorable condition of many of our kinsmen according to the flesh ought to constitute a strong appeal to the sympathies and prayers of Scotch-Irish Christians throughout the length and breadth of this land.

In the summer of 1898 the Presbytery of Asheville commissioned two evangelists to investigate the destitutions within her territory, which comprises the eleven most westerly counties of the State.

These evangelists, too, are both "mountain whites," and their natural bias is to an under-statement rather than an exaggeration of the evil conditions encountered. They were directed to leave railroads and telegraph lines and the larger valleys behind, and to penetrate into secluded coves and highlands and report what they found. They spent a little over three months in this work, preaching from house to house and in the woods, and sharing the rude accommodations and plain fare which the people offered with true hospitality.

In publishing the results of these investigations, there is no other object in view than to inform the more intelligent of our own people in regard to the appalling condition of many of our fellow-citizens within the bounds of our own counties, and to invite aid from all sources in overtaking the destitutions that confront us. It is time for us to make a thorough-going diagnosis of the case and then apply the proper remedies for the diseases that are found to exist. It is bad policy and bad principle to shut our eyes to patent facts. The first step toward improvement is to acknowledge the need of it. The following statements can be abundantly verified, if any one is disposed to challenge them.

Our evangelists found numbers of homes without a lamp, a candle, a comb, a brush, a looking-glass, and similar articles of civilized life. Many of the people had never seen a town, and the buggy in which the evangelists traveled was in some places considered a great curiosity.

The food was coarse, half-cooked, and often served on pieces of dishes black with dirt. The same vessel was frequently put to ablutionary and culinary uses. At night the evangelists often occupied the same room with the family, and slept on beds (?)

offensive to the olfactories and inhabited by obnoxious insects. In one of the coves they found a man and his ox occupying the same hut. This man claimed to have come from Wisconsin, and North Carolina is glad to be relieved of the responsibility of his nativity.

Several of our counties have no newspaper, which lack is at once a symptom and a cause of ignorance.

Need we be surprised to learn that there are many families in these counties of which not a member, old or young, can read a syllable, and in whose homes there is not a word of print—not even a patent medicine almanac!

What is worse, many families of a more intelligent grade were found without Bibles.

Our evangelists visited a thickly settled district of 150 square miles with four hundred children of school age, but no school for them to attend. Few of the adult population of this district can read. There is no church and no Sunday school. Ignorance, misery and vice abound. What wonder?

There are large sections of country in which hundreds of people live without the care of a physician. Old women administer their herbs, and quacks practice their superstitious arts. The physical suffering in these regions, much of which might be relieved by simple remedies and surgical operations, is distressing.

Profanity is common among men, women and children. Mothers are sometimes heard calling on God to damn their own children's souls, bringing to mind the text, "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget; yet will not I forget thee."

The women and children do most of the work. A majority of the men are idle nearly all of the time. Their most serious employment is hunting, or fishing, or running illicit distilleries and imbibing the blood of John Barleycorn. In some regions a young man has reached the summit of his ambition when he has learned to pick the banjo, owns a dog, and carries a pistol and a bottle of whiskey.

In many homes there were seen no evidences of affection between different members of the family. Children are governed

by brute force, until they become strong enough to fight their own way. The aged are neglected and despised.

Many children learn to use tobacco before they can talk, and are stunted in their growth.

Bastardy is common and is accounted no disgrace. Laxity in such matters discounts a man's character no more than in some of the fashionable city circles!

The following is an accurate sketch of one home, and is a fair sample of many. The family consists of seven members—father, mother, and five children, the eldest a daughter nearly grown. Not one of that family, parents or children, had ever been to school. They had never heard of Jesus Christ, and knew nothing of the resurrection of the body or the immortality of the soul. They live in a fairly good cabin on their own little farm of fifty acres.

Many homes were visited into which no minister of the gospel had ever entered before, and whose inmates had never heard the Word of God read or a prayer offered. While worship was being conducted, the members of these households did not know how to deport themselves; some stood; some walked about, and some lay down.

In some sections the so-called religious leaders are ignorant and immoral. Our evangelists spent the night with a minister (!) who had no Bible in his house, and whose wife refused to join in family worship. They encountered another preacher who was a drunkard and was living with two wives. Is it any wonder that the people of that particular region declared that they had no confidence in ministers and declined to hear the evangelists preach?

Many other facts of the same kind might be given, but these are sufficient to show that under the shadow of these beautiful mountains there are hundreds of our fellow-citizens living in poverty, ignorance and vice. The causes of this degeneration from the intelligent, thrifty and virtuous Scotch-Irish type, have been aptly summarized by my predecessor, Dr. W. S. Plumer Bryan, now pastor of the Church of the Covenant, Chicago:

"They have been reduced to their present condition of poverty and ignorance by the strenuous conditions under which they have been compelled to live. No one who has never himself ex-

perienced those conditions can realize how terrible is their effect upon the individual life, or how great their effect must be upon the life of a family from generation to generation. To live on the mountain-side and perhaps in the depths of a forest, without roads, without means of transportation, on such products as the soil outside the cabin door provides, and in climates of great severity, will tell upon any man or woman, or family or stock, however fine its origin may be. The physical effect is only exceeded by the mental. Imagine your own condition if you were compelled to live year after year in the same house, and with the same surroundings, engaged in the drudgery of the house, or in the drudgery of the field. The nearest neighbor's house is often too far for a visit; and if it be near enough, the house is often but little better than the one from which the visitor comes. The conversation centers on the crops and the household events, with only now and then a vague report from the great world outside. Any one who would not degenerate under hard conditions like these would be more than human, and in my opinion these strenuous conditions are quite enough to account for the peculiarities and deficiencies of the class under our discussion."

There are two other considerations, perhaps, that ought to be added. First, the settlers in the coves and on the poorer highlands were no doubt less aggressive and vigorous than those who pushed on to better lands and more propitious surroundings. And, second, the country was so sparsely settled as to make it almost impossible to perpetuate the inherited institutions, the school and the church. The few books they brought with them were soon lost or torn to pieces by the young children, and a mental and spiritual famine has been the natural sequence, the minds and souls of each successive generation becoming more and more anaemic for lack of nourishment.

If these people were Scotch-Irish racially, they were of course Presbyterian ecclesiastically. We need not be surprised, therefore, to find Presbyterian traditions surviving, even where all intelligent idea of Presbyterianism is wanting. It is a well-known fact that here and there through the mountains, the name "Presbyterian bread" is applied to cold yeast bread, often by people who never use the word Presbyterian in any other connection and who know nothing of its meaning. But the intelligent

dwellers in the valleys, among whom Presbyterianism has survived as a distinctive form of the Christian faith, say that this cold bread was so called because of the time-honored Presbyterian custom of abstaining as far as possible from cooking and other household work on Sunday.

One of our missionaries, who within two years has built up a Presbyterian church of about seventy members in a community where there had previously been not one, recently used this fact with telling effect in preaching to his people on Sabbath observance.

Many persons told our evangelists that their parents or grandparents were Presbyterians. The Presbyterian church failed to feed and tend these scattered members of its fold, and the more aggressive Methodist and Baptist churches gathered them into their folds. God bless them for it!

But there are thousands of these people who are not reached by any church, and there is work enough to keep all denominations busy for some time to come.

In an address delivered before the Seventh Congress of the Scotch-Irish Society of America, which met at Lexington, Va., in June, 1895, Dr. John Hall said: "I have been hearing and reading, again and again, of the large number of so-called mountain whites, and poor whites that are found over various states, many of whom, I am sure, have more or less of the Scotch-Irish blood in their veins, poorly educated, with many difficulties with which to contend, and, I am sorry to say, with not a few vices, in illustration of the old Latin proverb that the corruptions of the best things are the worst. I say we can join together in creating public sentiment in their interest, in trying to move statesmen to greater educational facilities, and, as churches, we can combine and co-operate together in bringing to bear upon them the influence which God exerted to make our fore-fathers what they have been in the history, what they have been in the life, of this great nation; and oh! what a good thing it would be, whatever our denomination, if we could so reach these hundreds and thousands of our fellow-citizens, not a few of them, I am sure, of our own race, with the glorious and blessed truth which is the strongest elevating force in the world, and lift them up to something like the same plane upon which our fore-fathers stood.

so that they might be permitted to partake of the benefits and blessings which, through the kindness of God, we have been enabled to enjoy."

III. WHAT THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IS DOING.

The Woman's Board of Home Missions of the Presbyterian church (North), has established schools at Asheville, Marshall, Hot Springs and other points, which are doing more than any other agency to promote the cause of Christian education in Western North Carolina.

The Cumberland Presbyterian Church is also rendering valuable service through its preachers and teachers.

The Southern Presbyterian church has been working this field for a good many years, and not without success; but just now the work is being pushed with more enthusiasm and aggressiveness and along broader lines than ever before.

Until a little more than two years ago, the territory west of the Blue Ridge mountains was embraced in the Presbytery of Mecklenburg, which included the following counties (see map): Anson, Union, Mecklenburg, Gaston, Lincoln, Cleveland, Rutherford, Polk, Henderson, Buncombe, Madison, Transylvania, Haywood, Jackson, Swain, Macon, Graham, Clay and Cherokee. The shape of the Presbytery was that of an arrow split down the middle. The counties east of the mountains forming the shaft and those west of the mountains the half-head of the arrow. The extreme length was not far short of three hundred miles. Charlotte, though not the geographical center, was, on account of its wonderful Presbyterian strength, the heart of the Presbytery. The work west of the Blue Ridge, because of the great distance from the heart, measured not by miles only, but by inaccessibility, was suffering from sluggish circulation. The Synod of North Carolina, therefore, in the fall of 1896, erected a new Presbytery embracing the eleven counties named that lie west of the Blue Ridge, and gave it the name of Asheville Presbytery.

At the time of this writing there have been only two annual reports from the churches of the new Presbytery. A comparison of some of the items of these reports will show

ONE YEAR'S PROGRESS.

	March 31, 1897	March 31, 1898	Per Cent. Increase.
Communicants	1000	1208	Over 20
Contributions to Home Missions	$ 923	$2388	160
Contributions to Foreign Missions	542	828	52
All Benevolent Causes	2164	4282	Nearly 100

Three new churches have been organized, and three church buildings erected. Many new preaching points have been opened which will naturally develop into churches, to become fresh centers of mission influence. It is the policy of the Presbytery to establish parochial schools within the bounds of every congregation and mission schools at outlying points. These schools will act as feeders to the schools of higher grade at Asheville, Hot Springs, etc., and in this way will greatly increase their efficiency in sending out their streams of influence to the more destitute sections of this region.

For these schools we need consecrated women and the means to support them. It is not hard to find the former; and it ought not to be hard to find the latter.

The object of this pamphlet is to enlist the prayers and liberality of Christians everywhere in behalf of this work.

Six hundred dollars will support a minister and two hundred dollars a teacher for one year.

Will not the reader help to give the benefits of Christian education and the priceless blessings of the gospel of Christ to the poor and needy in this beautiful "Land of the Sky."

Contributions may be sent to Rev. R. F. Campbell, Chairman of the Committee of Home Missions, or to Mr. W. A. Blair, the Treasurer of the Presbytery, Asheville, N. C.

Asheville, N. C., March 25, 1899.

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